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RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 1026  
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RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 1084

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SUBJECT: HAMAS: ITALY WEIGHS IN FOR ISRAEL WITH RUSSIANS

Classified By: POL M/C David D. Pearce for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PM Berlusconi reportedly has contacted Russian President Putin and urged that any visit of Hamas officials to Moscow be handled at as low a level as possible. Berlusconi made the call at the behest of Acting Israeli PM Olmert. End summary.

¶2. (C) A diplomatic advisor to Berlusconi said February 16 that Olmert had phoned his the Italian prime minister following the recent Russian announcement of plans to invite Hamas officials to talks in Moscow. Olmert reportedly noted Israel's displeasure at the development and asked that Berlusconi, who prides himself on his close ties with Putin, intercede.

¶3. (C) Berlusconi adviser Marco Carnelos told Pol M/C that Berlusconi wanted to be as helpful as possible to Olmert but was "not so naive" as to think he could actually get Putin to turn the Hamas visit off. The Italian PM called Putin and suggested that, if he could not actually roll back or turn off the visit, then he might at least try to handle it at as low a level as possible.

¶4. (C) Carnelos said Putin did not respond directly, but "took note" of the suggestion. The Russian president reportedly observed that the EU and U.S. have both designated Hamas as a terrorist organization, and cannot deal with it. Russia has not, and would like to play a constructive role.

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